

ogy," quickly identified the boxes as containers for the fuselages of Il-28 Beagle light jet bombers, long in the Soviet inventory. The arrival of these aircraft was not unexpected for the CIA had believed for some months that these

planes would eventually arrive in Cuba. The Il-28s had an operating radius of 750 miles and the capacity to carry 6,500 pounds of nuclear or conventional bombs. The CIA reported that the Soviets never provided nuclear muni-

tions for these planes to other countries. Thus, although President Kennedy was uncomfortable with this news, McCone and other advisors downplayed the threat.

U.S. Military Preparations



NA 342-K-1382

The president was not ready to sound the alarm over Soviet actions in the Caribbean. Certainly, he was not planning to invade Cuba as some critics would later charge. Kennedy followed developments in

Cuba closely but never examined his military's various planning documents or asked probing questions about how combat operations would unfold. Indeed, during the crisis he was surprised to learn that if he ordered an invasion,

The Joint Chiefs of Staff in the fall of 1962, left to right: Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, Army Chief of Staff; Gen. Curtis E. LeMay, Air Force Chief of Staff; Army Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Adm. George W. Anderson, Chief of Naval Operations; and Gen. David M. Shoup, Commandant of the Marine Corps.

U.S. forces could carry it out swiftly. Given Soviet activity there, however, prudence dictated that adequate preparations be made.

In 1961, after the Bay of Pigs disaster, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had directed Admiral Dennison's Atlantic Command to develop several Cuban contingency plans. The deterioration of the Cuban situation brought about the refinement of several relevant operation plans (OPLANs). OPLAN 312-62 (the latter two digits refer to the year the plan was issued) provided for three forms of air attack on Cuba: one for a strike against a single site of a specific type (e.g., a SAM site); one for attacks on all sites of one type (e.g., all SAM sites); and one for a broad, large-scale air assault. Navy, Marine, and Air Force units would be involved in these operations, as appropriate. If necessary, the air strikes would be followed by an amphibious and airborne invasion, embodied in OPLANs 314-62 and 316-62, in which all the services would take part.

Throughout early October 1962, U.S. military, naval, and air forces carried out routine peacetime operations, but their center of gravity shifted south to America's Caribbean and nearby Atlantic frontiers. The nuclear-powered aircraft carrier *Enterprise* (CVAN 65) and her escorts returned to Norfolk, Virginia, from a deployment to the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean. Several destroyers patrolled the early

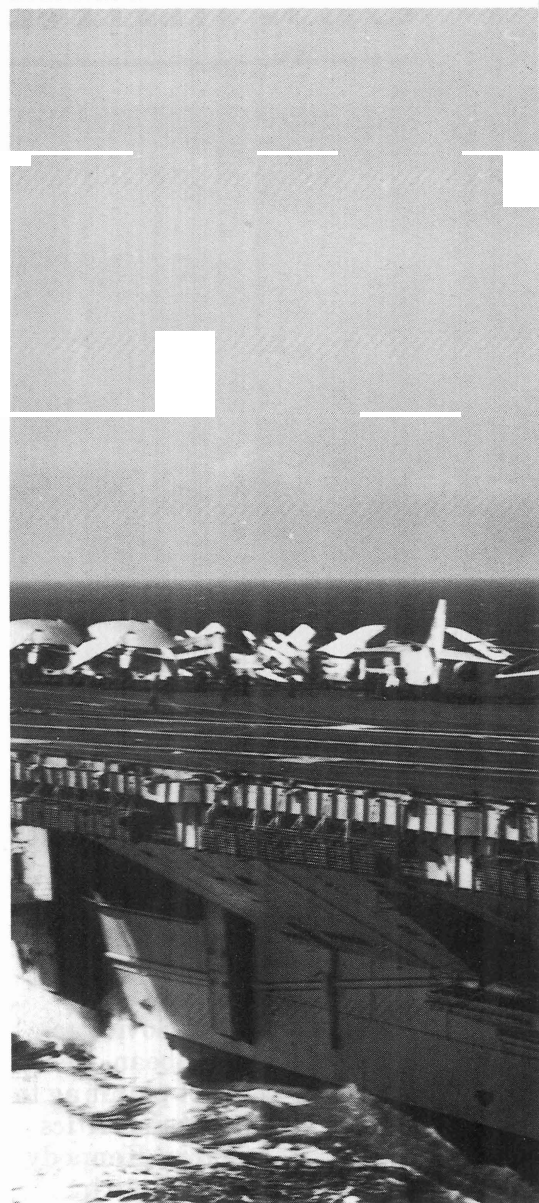
warning picket line established in the Atlantic and a single ship stood watch in the Straits of Florida.

Anti-Submarine Warfare Forces, Atlantic, led by Vice Admiral Edmund B. Taylor, conducted regular antisubmarine hunter-killer (HUK) operations. Each HUK group was composed of several destroyers, submarines, and an antisubmarine warfare (ASW) carrier equipped with S2F tracking planes and helicopters. *Essex* (CVS 9), only several days out of a refit at the New York Navy Yard, steamed toward Guantanamo Bay for six weeks of training. In support of the HUK groups were long-range P2V, P3V, and P5M patrol aircraft based at naval stations and facilities situated to cover the Atlantic and the Caribbean. They included Argentia, Newfoundland, in Canada; Lajes, Azores, off Portugal; Bermuda; Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico; Guantanamo, Cuba; and several bases in the continental United States.

In early October, the Amphibious Forces, Atlantic Fleet, command prepared to carry out an annual amphibious landing exercise involving eighteen ships from Amphibious Squadrons 8 and 12, three Marine battalion landing teams (BLT), and several Marine aircraft squadrons. The objective in the 1962 exercise was to land Marine forces on Vieques Island off Puerto Rico to oust from the island the fictional dictator "Ortsac" (Castro spelled backwards).

To reduce reaction time in case the president activated any of the CINCLANT contingency plans, the Joint Chiefs of Staff instructed Admiral Dennison to deploy naval forces off eastern Florida. The aircraft carrier *Independence* (CVA 62), with Carrier Air Group 7 embarked, departed

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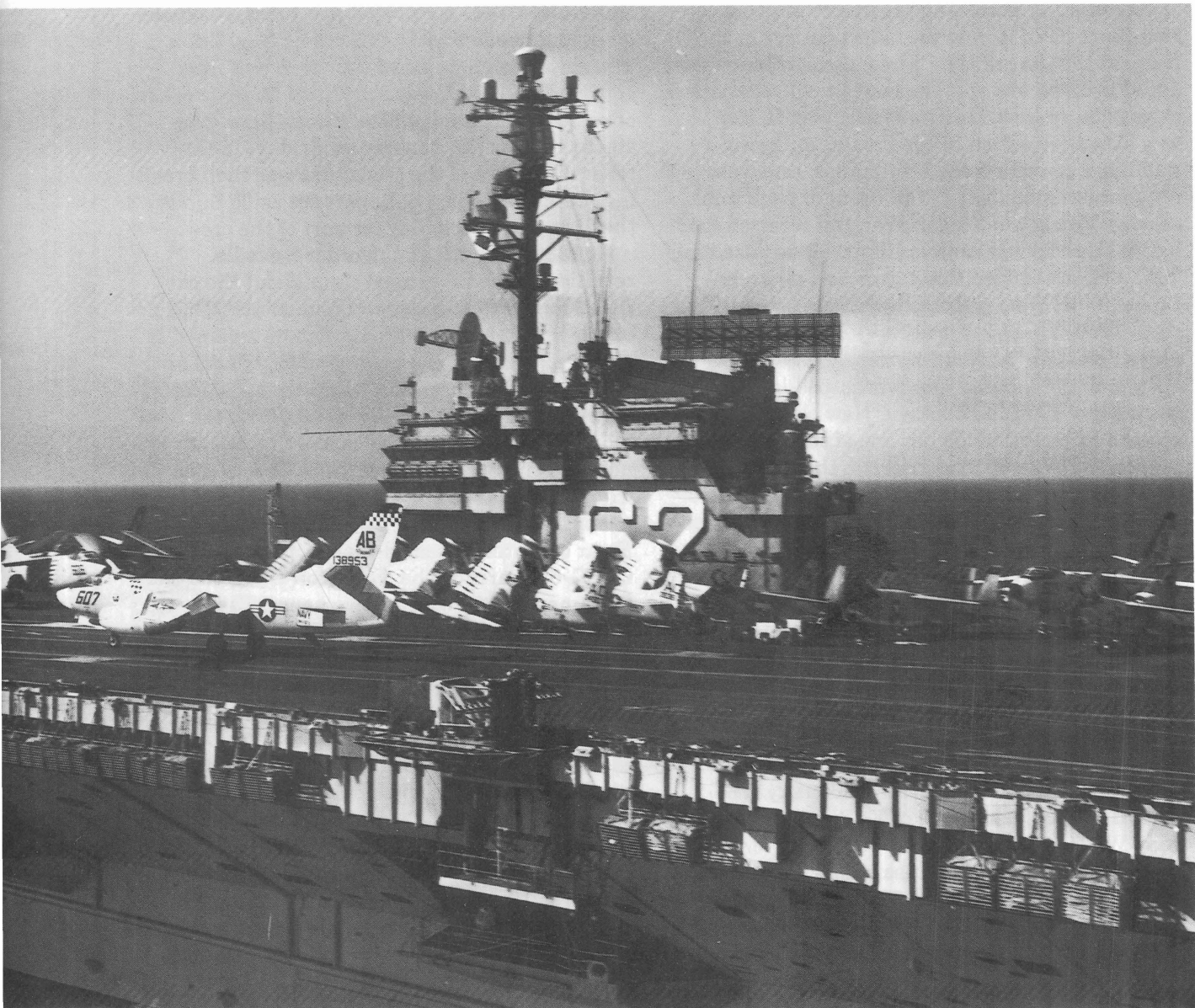


Norfolk on the 11th accompanied by destroyers *English* (DD 696), *Hank* (DD 702), *O'Hare* (DDR 889), and *Corry* (DDR 817). In addition, Marine Aircraft Wing 2 deployed elements of Marine Aircraft Groups 14 and 32 to NAS Key West and NS Roosevelt Roads on 13 October.

Admiral Dennison's Army and Air Force components also enhanced their readiness for Cuban operations. A number of Army units heightened their alert status and prepositioned supplies in the southern United States. The Air Force moved selected squadrons, equipment, and war con-

sumables to bases in Florida and its Tactical Air Command (TAC) trained intensively.

An A3D-2 Skywarrior of Heavy Attack Squadron 11, Det. 8, lands on board *Independence*, 20 October 1962. CVA 62 was one of the two fleet carriers involved in the Cuban Missile Crisis.



Essex (CVS 9), whose crew is unaware of the crisis brewing in Washington, heads for Guantanamo, Cuba, and a training evolution in mid-October 1962. This ship was a key component of the fleet's antisubmarine warfare force, as shown by the presence on the flight deck of the Grumman S2F Tracker, Grumman WF-2 Tracer airborne early warning aircraft, and Sikorsky HSS-2 Sea King helicopters of CVSG-60.

Essex: A Gallant Old Lady

The antisubmarine warfare (ASW) support carrier *Essex* (CVS 9) was the oldest carrier in the Navy at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Ordered in 1940, she was the lead ship of a carrier class of 24 vessels. During World War II, she saw extensive action in the Pacific, suffering a kamikaze attack off the Philippines. She was decommissioned in 1947 but brought back into service during the Korean War and received four battle stars for her contributions. Modernized in 1955 with an angled flight deck and other improvements, she served as an attack carrier until 1960. That year, the Navy converted the ship to an ASW support carrier.

In mid-1962, *Essex* was overhauled in the New York Navy Yard in Brooklyn. New electrical and sonar equipment made her one of the most modern ASW support carriers in the Navy. These improvements included the installation of a bow-mounted SQS-23 sonar, an Iconorama tactical display, and new electronic counter-measures equipment.

Essex employed Carrier Anti-Submarine Air Group (CVSG) 60 as her combat component. Led by Commander Robert L. Severns, the air group included two antisubmarine (VS) squadrons, an antisubmarine helicopter (HS) squadron, and a detachment of an airborne early warning (VAW) squadron. VS-34 and VS-39 flew Grumman S2F Trackers, while HS-9 operated Sikorsky HSS-2 Sea Kings. Detachment 9 of VAW-12 flew Grumman WF-2 Tracers, planes which could now be operated from *Essex* because of new data link gear installed during the 1962 refit.

Essex sailed from New York on 25 September,

embarked CVSG-60 off Quonset Point, Rhode Island, and headed for Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The ship, with many new crewmen and new equipment aboard, was scheduled for six weeks of refresher training off the Cuban base. She steamed into Guantanamo on Friday, 19 October. Unaware of the crisis that was then breaking, Captain Gerard S. Bogart set aside Sunday the 21st as a liberty day for part of the crew.

At 0330 on the 21st, the order "reveille, reveille, all hands" echoed throughout the carrier. The ship got underway immediately, but no one seemed to know why. Radiomen strained at their receivers to pick up any news, official or otherwise. The crew soon heard that the president would make an important address the next night. When a radio broadcast of that speech announced the quarantine of Cuba, cheers rose from all decks.

For the next 26 days, until 15 November, *Essex* operated at sea. Her air department and CVSG-60 searched the waters off Cuba and the Bahamas for 624 consecutive hours. The carrier's aircraft and sonar and her escorting destroyers tracked a submarine contact—Soviet Foxtrot-class submarine *F945*—finally forcing it to the surface.

Even though manned by a new crew using complex new equipment, the ship operated with great effectiveness. This demonstrated how well-trained officers and bluejackets of the U.S. Navy can adapt to changing situations. For their outstanding performance during the Cuban Missile Crisis, sailors and aircrewmen of the carrier received the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal.